

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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Annexing the Planets: The Colonization of the Alien Body in Science Fiction

Science fiction has its historical beginnings in the late colonial era, and the discourse of colonialism shares with the discourse of science fiction a terminology of discovery, exploration, conquest, mapping and the claiming of new lands. Thus, it is no accident that one of the central concerns of science fiction is precisely the central concern of colonial discourse and, later, of postcolonial theory: an effort to understand the troubled relationship between the self and the other, which in SF terms is figured in the relationship between the human and the alien being, or the human and the alien landscape. Looking at science fiction through the lens of postcolonial theory opens up a body of source material seldom considered by postcolonialism. In fact, because it removes a discussion of colonialism to a hypothetical realm, science fiction is able, in some ways, to be more truthful than so-called “high art” fiction about the central dilemma of colonialism: what do you do with the aliens? Science fiction often brushes aside colonialism’s humanist façade to show the colonialist’s hostility to environments and bodies which are constructed as other than human.

In this paper, I will read four well-known science fiction novels—H. G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds*, Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*, Frank Herbert’s *Dune* and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars*—to trace the ways in which they play out the colonial narrative in an imagined conflict between colonizers and colonized, between humans on the one hand and alien life forms or an alien landscape on the other. Since, in these classic SF novels, all by white men, alien bodies are often a stand-in for colonized bodies, it is not surprising that each of these novels maintains a sense of the radical physical difference between human and alien. To the end of seeing the relationship between this policing of the boundary between human and non-human bodies in light of postcolonial theory, I will make use in my close readings of SF novels of the insights garnered from Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic theoretization of psychological effects of colonialism in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon’s insistence on the unknowability, the difference of being black is particularly valuable for a discussion of science fiction, in which the fundamental character trait of the alien is always the strangeness of its body. For Fanon, blackness as difference is a social construction, and this constructed difference is accompanied by desire and miscommunication, hatred and fear; but precisely because it is a construction, this difference must be actively and repeatedly imposed by society. This may help to explain why science fiction is seldom able to envision the encounter between the alien and the human in any way that avoids this fear of the unknown. Science fiction, then, is seldom able to escape the historical forces that created it, and

instead continually repeats them. Yet in the conclusion I will discuss some more recent SF novels, films and television which have tended to blur these boundaries between alien and human bodies.